Saturday, Aug. 4. 1945

Dear Bob, Dick & Ben:

Well, fellows, I hardly know how to begin this.....so little to say. I, too, was once your respective ages, but I didn't have the ordeal of losing a father....particularly, being away from home.

Perhaps, I shouldn't have sent the cablegrams.....on the other hand I felt that you should know as quickly as possible and I am sure that you will be as brave as our Dad was.

He knew that he was terribly hurt.....told us that he doubted that he would get well. I was in his room just before they operated.....they were giving him "Plasma." He was watching very closely.....I told him...."that should make you feel just like a G.I." He looked up and winked at me.....kidded with us until they took him to the operating room.

But, let me start at the begining. Harold Aull came up from Tucumcari a week ago yesterday. He...his wife....John and Doris had planned to go to Aspen Wednesday morning to spend the balance of the week. We had to have some 1x8s run thru the planer so Tuesday nite I put on sharp knives and Dad and I ran a few boards to be sure that everything was in working order. The planer was running just fine so Dad and Billie Watkins were going to run the boards we needed the next morning.

Well, John left about eight Wednesday morning and we were rather busy at the yard so I didn't send Billie out to the house until almost eleven O'clock. I didn't like the idea of Dad running the planer, but had gone over everything thoroughly with him the nite before and he was so sure that they would get along alright that I finally sent Bill out and figured that they could run about an hour.....I could go home to lunch and check everything to see how they were getting along. I made up my mind that if they were having any trouble I'd stop them.....if they were doing O.K. I could still check things and then let them run after dinner.

I got tied up about twelve and didn't get away to lunch...being alone. Kel, the truck driver was here, but he had turned up sick that morning....first he would run to the toilet and then vomit.....so I didn't get to leave when I should have. They called about 12:30 and said that Dad had gotten hit by a board .....hurt a little and that they had quit planing. I just supposed it was minor and didn't get home until about 1:00. He was on the bed, and, frankly, looked like hell. Mother had called Dr. Munro and he had been there. Said it just looked like a bruise and shock. I couldn't eat. Had Mildred call Munro back .....got the ambulance and sent he and mother to the hospital. I immeaditely called John and he started right home.

They took Dad's blood count....x-rayed hi ....and then did it over again. He was vomiting a little blo , but quit that about dark.....and when we left the hospital at 0:30 that nite two doctors said that everything looked encou ging. His blood count was going down (which was a good sign) Th bleeding had stopped and both doctors said that he was in the h spital.....if his condition changed they could operate withi 30 minutes and there just coundn't be any slip-up. Mother stay d with him at the hospital and John and I went on home.

Thursday morning we both went by the hospital.....he was joking and looked fairly good. Mildred was up there about ten that morning and he kidded with her. She came back out to the house (I was there unloading lumber) and was real encouraged. John went up at noon to stay with him while mother went home to bathe and change clothes and he was much worse. I went up just as quickly as John got back and the Doctor told me that his stomach was pushing up thru his diaphram and crowding the heart. They x-rayed him every two hours and a pitture they took just before noon had showed that. He kept belching and gagging and I believe that the tear in the diaphram opened just a little more each time.....so that he was fast becoming critical. At noon (rather about 1:00 o'clock)when Munro told me that the stomach was crowding his heart and making breathing more difficult I knew he was awfully bad. Munro said they would operate within 30 minutes, but warned that even young people with a rupture like that had a very small chance. He said that Mayo Clinic lost 40 % of such cases.

I cabled you immeaditely.....except you, Ben. I felt that Bob and Dick had a chance to get home. I was sure that you, Ben, were stuck on Luzon and I didn't want to worry you....if Dad did have a chance and get thru. They operated for over an hour and John, Doris, Mother and I were there all the time. However, he was dying when they wheeled him back to the room. He lasted only an hour.....never did regain consciousness.

We were carrying insurance on him (State Compensation) and I'm sure that mother is entitled to $10,000.00. Furthermore, she has the sander business and that grosses about $100.00 per month.

Nell, Vergil and the kids got here this afternoon. Billie Watkins went to Pueblo after them. Gladys, Don and Donnie got in last nite....drove right thru. Uncle Frank, Ben, Ruth, Christine and perhaps, Aunt Carrie will be in tonite. All of them will stay two or three weeks. Both Vergil and Don had vacations coming.

And, now I'll have to ask you fellows to do the hardest thing that any man.....soldier or civilian ever faced. Mother is greiving her heart out for you three.....this afternoon she laid on the bed and wondered why Dad couldn't have lasted another two months until Bob and Dick at least got home. I want each of you to sit down and write her "that there must have been a superrior providence." You just can't let her know your true feelings

Dad wasn't cut or marked up a bit. He raised a lever on the planer which released the feed-rolls and it shot a board back that hit him squarely in the stomach. It ruptured an intestine .....broke the lining between his abdominal and lung cavity and bruised his stomach. He suffered a lot for 24 hours. However he walked in the house with Billie's help. The doctor said that an ordinary man would have been killed right there.

Mother and [illegible] for burial, but she decided against it. She wants to make her permanent home here because she feels that we five boys will be here. She also didn't feel equal to the train trip back there. Frankly, mother likes Colorado and wants to live here. Also she likes Mildred and Mildred likes her. She mentioned today that she was so very thankful that she could have Mildred to be with. Mildred is awfully good to her and was awfully good to Dad. Was always buying him cigars, beer, Beech-nut, or doing his personal shopping for socks, under-wear etc.

I hope that the three of you never get this letter.....that you are on the way home while I am writing this. Like you all know the army is unpredictable and in case you are held over I'm sure you would like to know.

We bought a very nice casket and a concrete vault. We will have funeral services tomorrow at 2:00 P.M. at St. Martin's Mortuary. We will have final interment after we hear whether any of you could get away or not. If you can't come and we hear to that effect we will go ahead and have simple rites at the cemetery the latter part of next week.

Fellows, you will just have to keep your chins up. Things happen....no cause....no justification. Dad said to me just after he was hurt and before he ever went to the hospital.... "no one to blame but myself....just damned carlessness."

I know.....just how you each must feel. I feel worse because I feel that I shouldn't have allowed him to run the planer. I'll take good care of mother....see that she goes...often. She shan't be alone, ever. Fellows that is all we can do...now.

Each of you must be partuclarly careful to get home O.K. There is now a greater need than ever for each of you to come home.

I so deeply regret that each of you didn't get home before this had to happen.

Lew

Ben, you were here just a short time ago....tell her that you would rather remember Dad as he was then....that since his passing was accidental it couldn't have done a lot of good for your having been here.

Dick....to you and Bob.....you can only tell her that God must have had a plan.

I've moved heaven and earth to get the three of you home..... called both Colorado Senators.....one congressman....and this afternoon the Red Cross called Washington and they promised to call Europe via Telephone to check with the commanding officers. Now, Ben, just because I didn't send you a cable-gram saying Dad was hurt, I didn't think that they would let you come, but I never-the-less put forth every effort for you, too.

I know how you fellows counted on Dad being here.....and you'll never realize how much he counted on seeing you. For the past six months his only worry has been the three boys in the army. Dad was more than that .....more than a father, I mean....to me. He was my business partner. When I married this summer I told he and mother that the house was paid for.....that it was theirs for so long as they should live. Mildred and I would build just as quickly as we could. So, if he knew he didn't have a chance .....he did know that mother would be taken care of.

Dad hadn't done a lot of work this summer. He hadn't been coming to the yard regularly since June 1st. He helped mother..... helped stack lumber at the house and just jimmied around. Mildred and I have kept beer by the case all summer and he enjoyed that immensely. Two or three bottles a day. Too, we kept our eyes open and kept his Beech Nut supply up to par. We just got out of debt the first of June and he got a helluva kick out of that.

Fellows, you had a swell Dad.....a swell pal. It is like I told mother.....we were all fortunate that we could have had such a swell Husband, and father for so many years. Think of the many people who never remember more than one parent. We older ones were the more fortunate in that respect, but personally, I feel that I can in part recompense my good fortunate by attempting to fill Dad's shoes for you fellows. Ben.....we will cut you in on a $1,000.00 interest in the yard....begining the first of Jan. 1945. In other words....this full year, now going on .....you are a partner.

You can each have lots for a house (right East of our house) at no cost whatever.

Dad was as true a soldier as ever lived. Even at his age he wouldn't quit work or even hear of it. Keeping him at the house was the only salvation.

I've been terrible. I know, in asking you fellows to write